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ABSTRACT

The struggles over "who gets what" in academe have been labeled "turf wars." The quest for resources is directly linked to a department's ability to successfully lay claim to specific academic turf or particular facets of the study of communication, which in turn affects student appeal, and therefore, enrollments. Departments with large numbers of students and their tuition dollars may be viewed favorably by university officials as offering a form of operational efficiency, especially when the students can be handled with few faculty. As the number of communication departments has increased on a campus, the number of rivals and competitors has also grown. Communication studies which focus on distinct applications or specific professions were the first to find a diverging path. Among the earliest units to peel away from the umbrella departments of speech were theater and speech pathology, followed by mass communication, with programs in broadcasting or radio-television forming departments which may include film. Journalism departments may offer courses in advertising and public relations. However, broad, less specialized programs, where several communication fields coexist within the same unit do seem to provide certain positive features, such as the emphasis of the common theoretical base of communication, increased intellectual stimulation, team teaching, cross-fertilization of ideas, and flexible faculty assignments. Several universities (Ohio State, the University of Arizona, and Northern Illinois) are currently engaged in considering whether to blend some communication programs or to eliminate them altogether. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

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Communication Turf Wars of the 90's:
Are They Necessary?

College campuses in the 1990's have been the scene of budget cuts, down-sizing, mergers, and refocusing at the institution, college, and department levels. Such moves have been attributed to a drop in the college age population, a sagging economy, a scarcity of resources, and a re-examination of mission. In some cases, communication programs have been among those directly affected, with a few of these being eliminated altogether. Even as the size of enrollments is again on the increase, and as many state economies are showing signs of return to health, the growing emphasis on accountability, the administrative efforts to increase and demonstrate efficiency in operation, the increasing emphasis on program reviews, and the scrutinizing of communication departments to determine their relevance to the evolving definitions of university missions is leading to questions about whether such programs as speech, public address, interpersonal communication, theater, radio-television-film, journalism, public relations, and advertising are all essential, or perhaps even directly related, to an institution's reason for being.

With roots in rhetoric, communication studies have divided and multiplied along several directions, which has led to the present situation where a wide variety of disciplines or fields seem to be vying with each other for such essential resources as personnel, institutional financial support, space and facility

allocations, government and private grants, and even for students. These struggles over "who gets what" in academe have been labeled "turf wars." The quest for resources is directly linked to a department's ability to successfully lay claim to specific academic turf or particular facets of the study of communication, which in turn affects student appeal, and therefore, enrollments. Departments which draw large numbers of students and their tuition dollars may be viewed favorably by university officials as offering a form of operational efficiency, especially when the students can be handled with few faculty, as evidenced by large classes. Popularity of a field of study, as measured by a large body of majors with the student credit hours that they generate, may help departments compete successfully against other units in their pursuit of resources. As the number of communication departments has increased on a campus, the number of rivals and competitors has also grown.

Communication studies which focus on distinct applications or specific professions were the first to find a diverging path. Among the earliest units to peel away from the umbrella departments of speech were theater and speech pathology and audiology. Although they are still affiliated with speech in some schools, on other campuses these fields may provide a full spectrum of curricula and career orientation as separate departments. Paths also have frequently separated between speech and mass communication, with programs in broadcasting or radio-television forming departments which may include film, although in some instances

film or cinema is in a separate department.

The study of journalism brings up another perspective and direction in the area of communication. Traditionally, dealing with print, journalism's claim on content more closely related to oral communication has grown in the 90's when the concept of mass media has come to include both print and electronic forms. Thus journalism units may be offering courses similar to broadcasting programs, even at the same institution. Along with a focus on news, journalism departments may offer courses in advertising, promotion, and public relations. On some campuses, these, too, have evolved into separate departments, resulting in yet more competition for support.

Philosophy and methodology are also cited as reasons for uniqueness sufficient to justify classification in an individual department. Some scholars and researchers in the area of interpersonal communication would like to divorce themselves from speech, noting that the basic differences between these is the social scientific versus the humanistic approach.

The professional orientation as opposed to the theoretical emphasis is cited as an area of difference among mass communication programs, as well as between journalism and communication perspectives. Also viewed as theory versus practice, this may be at the heart of arguments by some journalists who suggest that placing journalism and communication together in the same department can result in a program that places too little focus on preparing students for careers in the industry and too much

emphasis on theoretical studies. Of course the opposite view may be held by others who charge that stressing preparation for a profession can translate into training students for their first job rather than for a career.

This wide array of program names and perspectives has resulted in equally varied organizational configurations among institutions and their communication units. It is not difficult to understand how this can contribute to confusion on the part of students, administrators, colleagues in other departments, and among communication faculty themselves, when questions arise as to who we are and what we do. No wonder there are also questions about how one school compares to another and about the relationship of communication departments to the goals and missions of the colleges and universities where they are housed. There is little or no consensus about what should be in the communication pie or how it should be sliced. Admittedly the history and political atmosphere on one campus may bear slim resemblance to that of another, and such individuality can surely account for some of the variations in timing, allegiances, and organizational configurations. There is also something to be said for unique and creative approaches, but the depth of differences and similarities (even duplications?) in communications programs among institutions and across a single campus can obviously be seen as a cause for questions from administrators or faculty committees when the race for resources gets intense or when cutbacks and cost trimming become essential.

Also understandable is the legitimacy of demands by university officials that we serve a genuine need, that we demonstrate clarity of purpose related to the institution's missions, and that we operate in a responsible manner.

In the 1990's, the trend toward division or evolution of communication departments into discrete units offering a specialized, career-oriented focus has changed. We are now in an atmosphere of eliminating or merging programs. University officials are asking departments for justification of existence and evidence of efficient operation. The mission of a department must be proven relevant to that of the institution. Departments that have specialized and spun off from broader based speech or communication or journalism units in the educational boom years of the 1960's or 70's may find themselves being herded back into more generic departments in the 90's. The turf wars continue and the stakes are being raised from resources to coexistence, or even existence. Assuming, at least in present company, that sufficient cause for continued existence of communication in college curricula can be taken for granted, consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of coexistence would seem appropriate.

Broad, less specialized programs, where several communication fields or perspectives coexist within the same unit under one umbrella designation do seem to provide certain positive features which are less likely to be found in specialized departments. The common theoretical base of communication is likely to

receive more emphasis here. Students will be exposed to more of the elements and dynamics of the process of communication, with less concentration on the arena in which it takes place. As Beniger describes it, this is "the phenomenon of information and its patterning, processing, and communication as central to culture, cognition, and social behavior" (20). He furthers this notion of unifying communication by citing the "folly of balkanizing it in separate studies -- like those of interpersonal, organizational, and mass communication -- as the American field has increasingly done" (24). Clearly the relevance of this approach to the over-all mission of an institution of higher learning would not be a difficult argument to make. In writing of the hierarchy of institutional values relative to communication, Monahan and Collins-Jarvis hold that "the field is now a loosely held together amalgamation of various perspectives, located in various types of university departments," and that more stress on "connectedness," or a shared core of knowledge, along with a return of creativity and social relevance will provide guiding values for the future (154). Stressing that we need to "move beyond our narrow career specializations if we hope to be successful in our responses to calls for greater accountability," Rakow calls for a move toward a communication curriculum that is "independent, integrated, inclusive, and visionary" (155). Citing the dangers in simply preparing students for today's media occupations, Rakow notes that divisions are becoming less sustainable in the curriculum. Because of our "artifi-

cial boundaries," not enough attention is being given to new technologies, "even as they are imbedding themselves further into our social, political, and economic lives" (157). Rogers and Chaffee also note that new communication technologies seem to be making a demand for integrative theories. Coherence of vision, they say, will lead toward unifying theories of communication, "independent of whether channels are the mass media, face-to-face, or interactive technologies" (130). Responding to the proposition that communication does not have disciplinary status because of deficient core knowledge, Entman maintains that this could be turned into a strength. Communication, he says, can become a "master discipline" if it can bring together related theories and concepts into one location (51). Others have suggested that the cognitive or cultural studies perspectives could serve as centerpieces for more unified approaches to communication. Still other scholars have emphasized such benefits as increased intellectual stimulation, camaraderie, team teaching, cross-fertilization of ideas, and flexible faculty assignments which could result from departmental integration. There is clearly no shortage of opinion indicating that some form of integration among communication studies is desirable, perhaps even necessary, to move us into the future and to ensure a continued presence for communication programs on the campus.

This concept, however, is not universally subscribed to. In direct opposition to the idea of pulling communication departments together is the position that we live in a world which is

becoming ever more segmented and specific, and this will require in-depth concentration and detail in studies if students are to be properly equipped to successfully compete for the employment opportunities that exist in a world of specialization. From this perspective, communication curricula must reflect the needs of the communication related industries which hire graduates of such programs. This is especially applicable in the area of mass communication where, in many colleges and universities, departments have gone to great lengths to establish ties with media, including radio and television stations, broadcast networks, filmmakers, recording studios, newspapers, advertising agencies, and public relations firms. These ties take such forms as endowed scholarships, established internship arrangements, and departmental advisory boards made up of media practitioners who offer input into the department's course offerings, co-curricular activities, and philosophy. Programs with this approach are not necessarily antithetical to the view that a broad, liberal arts education is ideal for its students. In order to assure breadth, a certain quota of credit hours may be taken in courses unrelated to the major or minor. This is the position held by the primary accrediting organization for media education programs, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, which actually places limits on the total percentage of media courses which can be applied toward graduation in programs it accredits. While the courses within the field of specialization may well include specific content and hands-on applications,

specialized programs may also incorporate courses offering breadth. Media law, history, and social impact are examples of this. Proponents of specialized departments in mass communications support the concept of professional education designed to prepare graduates to enter the workplace, but they do not see this as the only function of media curricula. There is also concern about the consumers of media. Some departments of journalism or broadcasting or mass communications are providing courses designed around concepts such as media literacy, film history and criticism, or other perspectives on the roles of media in America. Courses of this type are included among common curriculum or general education choices on some campuses.

Although they are solid, supported, and respected in many cases, it is mass communication programs which seem, relative to other communication departments, most vulnerable to attack in the 90's. At Ohio State University, the Department of Communication was engaged for two years in controversy with the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences over a 30 percent budget reduction and a merger with the School of Journalism. Communication and Journalism were expected to absorb most of the cuts for the college, and some of the faculty viewed the merger as a method of squeezing out faculty who focused on the humanistic as opposed to the social science approach. This merger is scheduled to take place in the summer of 1996 (Cegala, 3). Programs at the University of Arizona, the University of Washington, and Northern Illinois University are among those which have faced evaluations

possibly leading to elimination (VanSlyke Turk, 1995) In outlining the circumstances at the University of Washington and how his program survived, Thomas Scheidel, Department of Speech Communication chair, spelled out several lessons learned from the ordeal. Among these is the idea that each school's situation is unique. At Washington, the college budget reduction process was flawed and the decisions as to where cuts should made were subjective, hasty, and made without sufficient data or clear criteria. Thus, the case for elimination was not well constructed, and a review committee voted to retain the program. The general charge of "lack of centrality" was not convincing. Also, the department successfully orchestrated specific counter-attacks, including demonstrations, alumni testimonials, and documented evidence of positive teaching and research. Forming ties with other units on the campus through joint instructional and research projects was found to be helpful and is recommended by Scheidel as a preventive measure (12). Such cross-disciplinary efforts are likely to be beneficial in a variety of ways. Working with other departments can broaden the perspectives of faculty, stimulate creative, integrated research, and provide visibility and evidence of centrality by demonstrating the multifaceted relevance of communication. The generation of more applied research and interaction with those outside our field are cited by Avery as ways we can provide progress in the discipline and truly "make a difference in the real world" (174). Blanchard and Christ have offered a blueprint for renewal and reconstruc-

tion of media education which calls for moving beyond exclusive attention to the major and into general education (53).

Perhaps it is possible to combine the best features of depth and breadth in communication education. In the best of all worlds, this could be achieved with a program that provides theoretical and applied knowledge and understanding for the students (who could find rewarding careers), a positive reputation with practitioners in the field (who could look to us to supply capable, broadly educated graduates with realistic attitudes and practical experience), acceptance among our colleagues in other disciplines for our expertise, skill in teaching, and theoretical and practical research, and recognition by college and university administrators for achievements and excellence in all of the above.

Turf wars have been necessary in the past and they are going on at present. They will likely continue as long as communication programs are attacked and as long as their faculty defend them against charges of narrowness, imbalance, and irrelevance. Some of these have been won and some have not, but if we can learn from our victorious, beleaguered, and defeated colleagues, we can move to ensure that our philosophy and curricula are deserving of protection and that there are alternatives to rolling over. Some programs may even emerge from their battles stronger than they were before.

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